

Love's Number One Enemy...Unresolved Anger

What's the number one enemy of love? Marriage expert Gary Smalley says unresolved anger is enemy number one when it comes to love. If you don't deal with it, it will eat away at your happiness and your marriage.

Smalley says there are seven steps for unloading unresolved anger:

1. Define the Offense

To handle unresolved anger you need to focus on its root cause... your unfulfilled expectations. Your spouse hasn't done what you expected them to do. You're let down... hurt... you're angry. So first, identify your unmet expectation.

Take a look at your part in having this need unmet? Did you expect your spouse to just "know" what you wanted? Did you make assumptions about their actions? Did you come right out and say what you needed? That's often the only way to make sure your needs are known.

So, don't stew and pout on the inside. To get rid of, and prevent, unresolved anger it's your responsibility to be direct about your expectations. "Honey, I expected you to invite my parents for dinner too. I need you to tell me I look nice when we get dressed up to go out." Be open and direct to avoid future cases of unresolved anger.

2. Allow Yourself to Grieve

Don't just make light of what happened. Perhaps your spouse has deeply hurt you by their action or inaction. Even though you want to move on, make sure you appropriately face your feelings of loss and hurt, so you won't harbor grudges or resentment.

3. Try to Understand Your Offender

Your husband promised he would pick-up dinner Thursday night. Well, Thursday night rolls around and he walks in empty-handed. It would be easy to jump to conclusions, "He doesn't really put me first. If he did, he would remember things I need. He is so selfish."

But, perhaps your husband had an extremely tough day at work. Maybe he got some bad news about a friend. Or, maybe he innocently forgot. This is where it's up to you to state how you feel, and how your needs have gone unmet. But try to do so in a way that's not attacking. Give your spouse the benefit of the doubt.

4. Release Your Offender

Gary Smalley writes, "This step in dealing with anger involves giving up your desire for revenge." If you choose to harbor anger instead of dealing with it, you're unlikely to have the environment needed for a loving marriage.

In a best-case scenario, your offender will have seen the error of their ways and will have apologized to you. But if they don't, try to move on even without their admission. Focus on healing your own hurts instead of lashing out at your spouse.

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5. Look for Pearls in the Offense

Maybe the situation involving your unresolved anger caused you hurt and pain. In this step search for the positives of going through this tough time. Maybe you learned how to voice your own needs. Maybe you learned something about your spouse you never realized, information that explains many of their actions. Maybe you learned that you can take responsibility for your own happiness.

6. Put Your Feelings in Writing

If you still have feelings of anger or hurt, write them down. Spill out all of your fears and frustrations. You can even write a letter to your spouse. But, Smalley cautions that this letter is for your eyes only, do not give it to your spouse.

You can possibly use it to gather a few points for further discussion. When you've written out your thoughts, destroy your writings.

7. "Reach Out to Your Offender"

This can be a hard step, especially if you really haven't gotten over your unresolved anger. But think of it as wiping the slate clean. Put the past offense in the past, and leave it there. Don't hold back affection from your spouse or act coolly. Show them love and you will be more likely to get love in return.

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